

Commentary on Ireland's domain ranks in the 2015 Global AgeWatch Index

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Global AgeWatch Index rank

15
out of 96

Ireland ranks high at 15 overall and ranks consistently high in all domains.

It performs best in the enabling environment domain (16), with one of the highest rates of social connectedness among older people in the region (95%). It ranks high on the health domain (17), with values near regional averages for life expectancy at 60 (24) and healthy life expectancy at 60 (17.5) indicators.

In the income security domain it ranks at 18, with below the regional averages on the pension income coverage (90.5%) and GNI per capita (USD 36,737).

Ireland ranks lowest in the capability domain at 35, with values below regional averages on the employment of older people (51.3%) and educational attainment of older people (52.9%) indicators.



Income security

18
79.9/100

The incidence of poverty amongst older people in Ireland is not as pronounced as for other groups. However, in 2013 the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions found that the 'at risk' of poverty rate for those aged 65 years and over was 9.2%, while the experience of deprivation was 16.1%.

The government has continued to protect the weekly rate of the state pension in contrast to cuts to social welfare received by other cohorts. However, rising costs coupled with reductions in secondary income supports and the introduction of a number stealth charges for property tax and water, have meant that many older people find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. In the Budget 2015, the government increased the weekly living allowance from €7.70 to €9. However, this increase has fallen short of restoring any real value to this payment.



Health status

17
73.1/100

Direct cuts to health budgets have had a profound impact on people trying to access health services. This is having a disproportionate impact on older people. Stagnant budgets for funding allocated actually represent cuts as the number of older people grows. There has been a strong focus on moving people to long-term nursing home care to the detriment of providing adequate support services in the community and within the home. Thus, older people are restricted in their choices to live independently in their own homes and communities.



Capability

35

40.6/100

Unemployment is a critical social issue in Ireland at present. Much of the focus of the government's employment strategy has been on younger workers. Data from the OECD's 2013 report for the Department of Social Protection indicates that the employment rate of older workers (aged 55 to 64 years) was 50.8% in 2011, which was slightly higher than the EU average of 47.7% but below the OECD average of 54.4%.¹ Between 2007 and 2011, the unemployment rate amongst 55 to 64 year olds increased by seven percentage points.

The latest data from the Quarterly National Household Survey shows that the percentage of workers aged 60 to 64 years who are unemployed has remained steady for the last year at or around 10%.²

An objective of the National Positive Ageing Strategy is to promote access to a wide range of opportunities for continued learning and education for older people.



Enabling environment

16

77.0/100

Connectivity to the online world remains a challenge for people aged over 60 with over half of those aged between 60 and 74 never having accessed the internet. Ensuring that older people get online can increase social connections through the use of Skype and other programmes. Equally, the telephone allowance, a means tested payment for people under 70 and a universal entitlement for those over 70, has now been abolished. This support, which was part of the Household Benefits Package ensured that older people could afford the cost of this vital utility and enabled them to stay connected, especially those living in isolated rural communities.

While older people continue to have access to public transport through the free travel pass, the privatisation of routes and lack of increased funding for the scheme has created uncertainty about its future. The Travel Pass ensures older people can engage in a wide range of economic and social activities.

Security and safety is an important issue for older people in Ireland. A security system using a pendant alarm, which is run through a connection to a landline, provides much-needed security for many older people. However, the abolition of the telephone allowance has meant that many have cancelled their telephone contracts and have been left feeling vulnerable.

¹ Department of Social Protection, OECD Report: Review of the Irish Pensions System, 2013, www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/OECD-Review-of-the-Irish-Pensions-System.pdf

² See Quarterly National Household Survey statistics available from <http://www.cso.ie/en/qnhs/>

The Global AgeWatch Index ranks countries by how well their older populations are faring.

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